## Chapter 2. The Dying and Rising God in Mari

The years 1987 to 2001 saw the publication and reinterpretation of three documents from Mari attesting to the mythologem of Dumuzi as a dying and rising god. One document is a letter dated to the twelfth year of Zimri-līm (first half of the eighteenth century BCE). Composed by the head of a semi-nomadic Amorite tribe, it mentions in passing the death and return of Dumuzi. The other two records are economic in nature: one, which was from the fourth year of Zimri-līm, notes the calendar date of Dumuzi’s burial, whereas the other one notes the day of his return.[[1]](#footnote-2) Before these records were published, only a single Mesopotamian reference to Dumuzi’s ascent from the netherworld was extant, so the evidence from Mari bears great significance.

These three documents from Mari, which only recently came to scholarly attention, played no role in earlier debates about Dumuzi’s status as a dying and rising god. After their publication, however, they were often cited as further evidence of the mythologem’s vitality within Mesopotamia.[[2]](#footnote-3) Yet, Mari of the eighteenth century, located between Mesopotamia and Syria, comprised many Amorite groups that were distinct from the Sumerian and Old Akkadian culture. The fact that the relevant documents are written in Akkadian—which served as the international writing language of the second-millennium ancient Near East—is not sufficient to prove a Mesopotamian origin of the mythologem in Mari. Moreover, because of the use of Sumerian and Akkadian logograms, our acquaintance with the non-Mesopotamian gods of Mari, and of Syria in general, is relatively meager, certainly compared to the vast amount of information we have regarding the Sumero-Akkadian pantheon of the period.[[3]](#footnote-4) Nevertheless, in other respects, some of the distinctly West Semitic features overcome the language barrier, proving the West Semitic/Amorite orientation of Mari. This orientation is well reflected in the onomasticon of the population and some of its customs, such as the intuitive prophecy, the treaty ritual *qatālum ḫayaram*, and the Zukrum festival. They are all described in Akkadian documents, although considered to be part of the West Semitic heritage.[[4]](#footnote-5)

The location and orientation of Mari must therefore be considered when examining the mythologem of the dying and rising god in its documents. Although it is possible that the evidence from Mari testifies to the spread of the mythologem from Mesopotamia westward through the worship of Dumuzi, as some scholars have conjectured,[[5]](#footnote-6) it is also plausible that the documents in question attest for the opposite direction of influence—that the Amorites, who established their kingdoms in Syria and Mesopotamia, delivered the mythologem of the dying and rising god to their new settlements, where the dying god mythologem (i.e., without resurrection) was already prevalent.[[6]](#footnote-7) In that case, the scribes of Mari probably chose the name of Dumuzi, who shared several characteristics with their own dying and rising god, to serve as a logogram for that god.[[7]](#footnote-8)

The three documents from Mari, however, do not enable us to decide between these possibilities, the implications of which also affect cultures located far from that settlement. However, as a first step, we should examine the context and terminology in which Dumuzi’s death and rise are mentioned in Mari’s documents, the focus of this chapter.

1. Tablet A.1146: The Death and Return of Dumuzi

Letter A.1146 was sent by Ḫammi-ištamar, head of the Uprapu tribe, to his companion Yasmaḫ-Addu, head of the Yariḫu tribe; both belonged to the Amorite Bini-Yamina group. The letter’s aim was to encourage the Yariḫu tribe to join the campaign of Zimri-līm, king of Mari. To persuade Yasmaḫ-Addu to join the fight, Ḫammi-ištamar described how he had survived death over the course of several battles, comparing his rescues from recurring life-threatening situations to the periodic dying and returning to life of Dumuzi[[8]](#footnote-9):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 39 As for me, look at me, I [have] almost [been k]i[lled], |  |
| 40 I escaped fr[om de]ath! [Fr]om the mi[dst] |  |
| 41 of Aḫuna, during the rebellion, [I escaped] 10 times! |  |
| 42 Why, now, […[[9]](#footnote-10)] like Dumuz[i], |  |
| 43 at the end of the year they kill him, [and at the time of …[[10]](#footnote-11)] |  |
| 44 he keeps retur[ning] to the temple of Annunitum. |  |

Dumuzi’s periodic return from the netherworld to the temple of the goddess Annunitum is indicated by the verb *târu* “to return” in the Gtn conjugation, which denotes iterative action (l. 44). Because Mesopotamian literature refers to the netherworld as the “Land of No Return” (*erṣet/māt lā târi*),[[11]](#footnote-12) use of this verb to describe Dumuzi’s resurrection is particularly fitting. The term *munût šattim*—literally, “counting of the year”[[12]](#footnote-13)—to indicate the time of Dumuzi’s death (l. 43) also attests to its recurring character.

To describe the actual death of Dumuzi, the scribe uses the root *dâkum* (to kill), although with a vowel uncharacteristic of that root (a), possibly affected from the Mari dialect (l. 43).[[13]](#footnote-14) Alternatively, some have interpreted it as deriving from the root *dakāšum* (to stab), reconstructing *idakkušū*[*šu*]accordingly.[[14]](#footnote-15)

In addition to its unusual content—one of only two documents before the late antiquity period describing both the dying and rising of Dumuzi—this letter is important for two reasons. First, its significance derives from its epistolary genre. In contrast to literary works that naturally accrue additions and expansions (as well as omissions) introduced by scribes and editors, an epistolary text does not develop in such a fashion. Therefore, it cannot be argued that either of the two parts of the mythologem—the death or resurrection—was interpolated at a later stage. Rather, the passing mention of Dumuzi’s death *and* resurrection in this letter is the work of a single hand at a particular time.

Second, the importance of the letter is related to the identity of its composer. Unlike letters written by temple or palace functionaries that may preserve various mythologems and literary themes because of their authors’ scholarly education,[[15]](#footnote-16) this letter was composed by Ḫammi-ištamar, the head of a semi-nomadic Amorite tribe. That his Amorite identity was very significant to him is testified by his efforts to convince Yasmaḫ-Addu to remain loyal to the nomadic ethos. The letter’s sociolinguistic register—characterized by curses, vulgarisms, and possibly also grammatical errors—further presents Ḫammi-ištamar as a layman, an uneducated person. This would suggest that the concept of Dumuzi as a resurrected god was widespread among the common people in Mari, including among members of the tribes that had yet to urbanize.

The following economic records reinforce two points made in Ḫammi-ištamar’s letter: the people of Mari regarded Dumuzi as a dying and rising god, and his burial and return were commemorated in the temples. Because Dumuzi had no temple in Mari, these rituals apparently took place in the temples of his spouses Annunitum or Ištar.[[16]](#footnote-17)

1. Tablet A.4540: The Death of Dumuzi

Tablet A.4540 attests to a funerary ritual held for Dumuzi, recording the amounts of sesame oil needed to clean and polish the deity’s statue in preparation for the burial. Although the ancient tradition of Dumuzi’s death is undisputed, this document nevertheless is significant because it is the first extant economic document to mention such a ritual.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1 One *qa* of oil |  |
| 2 for the bathing of (the statue of) Ištar. |  |
| 3 15 shekelsof oil |  |
| 4 for the burial |  |
| 5 of (the statue of) Dumuzi. |  |
| 6 Month of Abu, day 19th, |  |
| 7 year in which Zimri-līm |  |
| 8 offered a great th[ro]ne for <Šamaš> (=4th year of Zimri-Līm). |  |

When this tablet was first published in the 1970s, Georges Dossin claimed that the term *temrum* (l. 4) is a *hapax legomenon*. He therefore interpreted it as “cleansing”—paralleling the “bathing” of Ištar in the previous line. The three Akkadian dictionaries (*AHw*, *CAD,* and *CDA*) offer another translation: on the basis of Sumero-Akkadian lexical lists, they conclude that the term denotes a cultic meal of roasted fish or, alternatively, the coals used for this purpose.[[17]](#footnote-18) In 2011, however, Antoine Jacquet, followed by Dominique Charpin, suggested that the term *temrum* is derived from the Akkadian root *temērum* “to bury.”[[18]](#footnote-19) Because this verb refers to the burial of objects, including figurines and magical paraphernalia, it is particularly appropriate in the context of a funerary ritual revolving around Dumuzi’s statue.

The date appearing on the tablet is Abu 19. Although Abu denotes the fourth month in the economic records from Mari, epistolary documents from the settlement refer to the same month by the name “Dumuzi,” as did the Assyrian calendar commonly used there before the reign of Zimri-līm. Therefore, because the present document is dated to the fourth year of Zimri-līm, it represents in effect—as already mentioned—the earliest attestation of funerary rituals connected to Dumuzi, which were held in the fourth and fifth months in Mesopotamia and elsewhere.[[19]](#footnote-20) Nevertheless, the early attestation has no significance as to the origin of this custom, because the very name of the fourth month (i.e., “Dumuzi”) implies the existence of funerary rites for the god before its first documentation in Mari.

1. Tablet *MARI* 5, 1987.14: The Return of Dumuzi

A ritual in honor of Dumuzi’s return is indicated by these verses on Tablet *MARI* 5, 1987.14[[20]](#footnote-21):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1 ½ qa of oil […] |  |
| 2 for the *gibbum*-rite. |  |
| 3 […] |  |
| 4 ½ qa of ‘oil of the head’ from Mari |  |
| 5 for Dumuz[i], |  |
| 6 when he retu[rn]ed. |  |
| 7 Month of *Bēlet-b*[*īri*], |  |
| 8 day 9th, |  |
| 9 […] |  |

The return of Dumuzi is recorded in lines 5 and 6: *ana Dumuzi inūma itu*[*rru*]. Because Ḫammi-ištamar uses the root *târu* (here in the G present) to describe Dumuzi’s resurrection, which, as mentioned earlier, is part of the common Akkadian appellation for the netherworld *erṣet/māt lā târi*, it may have served in Mari as a unique term for the return of Dumuzi from the netherworld.[[21]](#footnote-22) This return occurs, according to this tablet, six months after Dumuzi’s burial (in the month of Abu, according to the former tablet); that is, in the month of *Bēlet*-*bīri*, the tenth month of the Mari calendar.

If this interpretation is correct, this document is not only the earliest evidence of a ceremony held in honor of Dumuzi’s return from the netherworld but also is the *only* evidence of such a ceremony being held in Mesopotamia or its neighboring regions.[[22]](#footnote-23) Further, unlike the Neo-Assyrian burial rites dedicated to Dumuzi (discussed in Chapter 1), both the return of Dumuzi in the month of *Bēlet-bīri* during the winter season and the absence of the dead spirits or mourners show that it has no relation either to the annual wailing for Dumuzi or to his burial rites. Rather, this tablet uses identical terminology to that of the Amorite chief Ḫammi-ištamar regarding the recurrent return of Dumuzi from the dead to the temple of Annunitum.

1. Conclusions

The findings from Mari indicate both that the head of one of the semi-nomadic Amorite tribes was clearly familiar with the mythologem of the death and return of a god named Dumuzi and that this mythologem was related to a ritual performed in the temple. Two economic texts, detailing the materials required for the burial rite of Dumuzi and for his return, both taking place in temples, strengthen this assumption.[[23]](#footnote-24) Because Dumuzi is hardly mentioned in other documents from Old Babylonian Mari (including the onomasticon), these three documents have great significance in understanding Dumuzi’s character in Mari.

Assuming they relate to the Sumerian god Dumuzi, these documents support the premise that in the eighteenth century BCE Dumuzi was considered a dying and rising god throughout Mesopotamia and beyond. The dominance of the Amorite tribes in Mari, the location of Mari between Mesopotamia and Syria, and the semi-nomadic identity of Ḫammi-ištamar who composed the letter provide the strongest evidence for the existence of the mythologem in Mari. That only a single document from Mesopotamia attests to this mythologem does not therefore reflect its real prevalence in Mesopotamia nor its tremendous impact on its neighbors. In fact, the rarity of this mythologem in Mesopotamia, in contrast to Mari, may support the suggestion that the presence of this mythologem in Mari did not result from Mesopotamian influence. Rather, it may have belonged to the heritage of the Amorite tribes who settled there, a tradition also reflected in other West Semitic elements documented in Mari, such as the intuitive prophecy, the treaty ritual *qatālum ḫayaram*, the Zukrum festival, and the myth of the storm god’s combat against Sea.

This possibility leaves unknown the identity of the West Semitic god to whom this mythologem could have been associated in Mari, because his name was written through the Sumerian logogram DUMU.ZI. Jean-Marie Durand proposed tracing this unrecognized god by examining Amorite personal names bearing the components *Yamūt*- (to die) and *Yašūb*- (to return) in Mari.[[24]](#footnote-25) As such, he follows scholars like Albrecht Goetze who suggest interpreting the Amorite eponym name *Yamūt-**Bāl* “Baal died” and the personal name *Yašūb-Dagan* “Dagan returned”[[25]](#footnote-26) as referring “to the myth of the dying and resurrected god as it is familiar to us from the Ras Shamra epic.”[[26]](#footnote-27) To date, however, the component *Bālum* (in all forms) in the Mari onomasticon is commonly interpreted as an epithet, “The Lord,” rather than the West Semitic god Baal. This interpretation is favored because of the lack of evidence of Baal’s cult in the texts of Mari and the use of the component *Bālum* as a predicate in various personal names.[[27]](#footnote-28) Durand therefore suggests seeing Dagan and Addu (rather than Baal)—whose names conjugate with the *Yašūb*- component—as the Amorite dying and rising god(s) signified by the logogram DUMU.ZI.[[28]](#footnote-29)

Nevertheless, without further evidence as to the identity of the god(s) to whom the mythologem of the dying and rising god was attributed, the onomasticon alone is not sufficient. This is especially true given that Dagan and Addu are mentioned by name in the Mariote texts without implying their dying or resurrecting. Although one could cautiously assume that the lack of evidence for Baal’s cult in Mari may be the result of writing his name in the Mariote Akkadian texts by the logogram DUMU.ZI, whereas the Amorite onomasticon kept the genuine name of that god, this suggestion has no further supporting evidence.

We may ask, therefore, to what extent was the dying and rising god mythologem prevalent in texts written in the *provenance lands* of the Amorites—namely, in the Syro-Levantine region south and west of Mari—and to which deities was the mythologem related. These issues are discussed in the next two chapters.

1. Dumuzi/Ama’ušumgal is documented in Mari before the Old Babylonian period (like many other Mesopotamian gods; see Edzard 1967, 53, n. 2, 69; Lambert 1985, 530), but this has no bearing on the present discussion because the attributes of that deity in Mari prior to the Amorite migration are unknown. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Cf. Parpola 1997, p. xciv, n. 127; Mettinger 2001, 201–202; Frahm 2003; Alster 2005/2006, 353–354; Cohen 2011, 262. Exceptions in this regard are Durand 2008, 243–247, and Jacqet 2008, 419–420, who suggested that the name “Dumuzi” in Mari documents represents Amorite deities who share the dying and rising god mythologem with the Mesopotamian Dumuzi; see the later discussion. According to Scurlock 2013, 162, in contrast, the Mari letter A.1146, one of the main texts in this regard, “should be removed from the argument” because it only refers to the fact that Dumuzi is re-killed every year. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. For the lack of information about the West Semitic pantheon of Mari, see, e.g., Lambert 1985, 532–533. The use of Sumero-Akkadian logograms for West Semitic deities is expressed, for instance, in the logogram dNIN.URTA relating to the prominent god who participates in the Zukru <AU: Or Zukrum, as in the text?> festival and is mentioned in other texts from Emar (Fleming 2000, passim) and El-Amarna (Na’aman 1990). The same is true for the logograms dDA.MU and dA in El-Amarna letters. It is plausible that the name “Têmtum” in letter A.1968 from Mari/Aleppo was also used as a logogram for Yamm (cf. Durand 1993). Note that due to the occurrence of dDA.MU in EA 84, scholars were convinced that it proved the existence of a dying and rising god in the Levant, both because of the identification of Damu with Dumuzi in Mesopotamia and those scholars’ knowledge of the worship of Adonis in Byblos (it was first proposed by Schroeder in 1915). Nevertheless, as Chapter 1 concludes, almost all the occurrences of Dumuzi, not to mention Damu or Ama’ušumgalana, have no relation at all to this function. Na’aman 1990 assumed that this DA.MU has no relation to a Mesopotamian god at all, but rather is the generic word *dāmu* used as the appellation of Ba’alat-Gebal. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. For a discussion of the various Western Semitic characteristics of the Amorite culture of Mari and its relation to the Syro-Levantine cultures of the second and first millennia BCE, see the overview of Malamat 1998; and cf. Held 1970; Durand 1993; 2008; Fleming 2000, 113–121; Anbar 2007; Wasserman and Bloch 2019. For the Western Semitic onomasticon in Mari, see Streck 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Cf. Mettinger 2001, 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. For the elements defining this mythologem, see Chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Cf. Durand 2008, 243–247, as well as 206–207, who maintains that most occurrences of the name “Dumuzi” in the records from Mari do not refer to the Mesopotamian deity but rather to a god of Amorite provenance. For Dumuzi as *the* dying god in Old Babylonian Mesopotamia, rather than Damu or Ama’ušumgalana, see Katz 2003, 163. For using the logogram of DUMU.ZI in most of the Mesopotamian cuneiform texts, see Chapter 1, p. xxx, n. x. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. For the text and translation, see Marello 1992; Durand 1997, 147–151; cf. Anbar 2007, 228–230; Wasserman and Bloch 2019, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Marello 1992 reconstructs *lā anāku* (“am I not”…). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Marello 1992 reconstructs *ina dīšim* (“in the spring”), and though many have agreed with him, there is no evidence to support it (cf. also Scurlock 2013, 162). It rather seems to be influenced, as in many other cases, by the patristic writings of the late antiquity describing the resurrection of Dumuzi during the spring. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Sumerian: kur-nu-gi4/gi; kur-nu-gi4/gi-a; kur-nu-gi4-gi4.For a discussion of the occurrences of these terms in Sumerian and Akkadian, see Horowitz 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. In another letter from Mari (*ARMT* 13, 29:9; cf. *CAD* M2, 206a) the term *munûtum* refers to the end of a month-long period. Cf. the equivalent biblical term תקופת השנה (Ex 34:22; of the root *n-q-p*), which is parallel to צאת השנה (Ex 23:16), meaning the end of the year. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Cf. Alster 2011, 61, n. 20. This letter suffers additional abnormalities throughout, either due to errors or a unique dialect. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Thus Durand 1997, 150, note n, but cf. Marello 1992, 120, n. l. By contrast, Frahm 2003 suggests that the verb is derived from the root *dekû (idakkûšu*), meaning “to arouse from sleep, to raise.” If this suggestion is correct, Mari’s version of Dumuzi’s resurrection would more closely resemble the resurrection of gods and men in Greek (ἐγείρω, ἀνίστημι), Phoenician (*q-w-m*), and Hebrew (*y-q-ṣ/q-y-ṣ, q-w-m*) texts from the first millennium BCE and CE. (For a discussion of these verbs, see Cook 2018, 7–30 and see more in Excursus 1). We lack, however, evidence of such a tradition regarding the gods of Syria and Mesopotamia in the second millennium BCE. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Especially notable in this regard are the sophisticated letters of Nūr-sîn of Mari composed while he was staying at Aleppo; see, e.g., Sasson 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. For the absence of a Dumuzi temple in Mari, see Kutcher 1990. Dumuzi’s return to the temple of his spouse may be also related to her role in his resurrection. This role is manifested in the Mesopotamian composition in relation to Dumuzi (see Chapter 1), in the Hittite text of North-Western Semitic origin in relation to the storm god (see Chapter 4), and in the late antiquity writings in relation to Adonis/biblical Tammuz (see Chapter 1). The Baal Cycle, in contrast, apparently omits the central role of the goddess in the resurrection of Baal, as it does also in the story of the combat of Baal against Yamm in relation to Anat/Astarte (as opposed to parallel texts describing the goddess’s assistance; see Ayali-Darshan 2020, 90–91, 226). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Dossin 1975, 27–28; *AhW* 1346, s.v. *temrum*; *CAD* T, 419, s.v. *timru*; *CDA*, 404, s.v. *temrum*. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Jacquet 2008, 410–411 and 418–419; 2011, 139; Charpin 2012, 77. Another conjugation of the root, *timirtum*, with a similar meaning, is also recorded in Mari, and in the plural (*timrāni*) in a Neo-Assyrian letter (*CAD* T, s.v. *timirtu*, *timru*). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. For later evidence of funerary rituals connected to Dumuzi during these months, see Chapter 1, n. xxx. Kutscher 1990, 40 suggests that document *ARM* IX 175 from Mari—which prescribes a large amount of barley for female mourners (“3 *ugar* [= 3600 *qa*] *še’um ana* MÍ.MEŠ*bakkītim*”)and which is dated Abu (= the fourth month) 9th—is also referring to the ritual mourning of Dumuzi’s death. Another document from Mari, *ARM* XII 437, which is also dated Abu 9th, mentions large amounts of products for the *Kipsum* ritual. Cf. Sasson 1979, 124; Mettinger 2001, 200–201, n. 91; Jacquet 2008, 418. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Charpin 1987, 599. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Cf. Charpin 2012, 77; Jacquet 2008, 418–420. However, it cannot be ruled out that this line denotes the return of Dumuzi’s statue to its original place after it was used for a ritual in another temple; see Cohen 2015, 319. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Cf., however, the unconvincing suggestion of Emelianov 2019, 94–95 regarding other evidence for the tenth month as the date of Dumuzi’s rise. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. Mettinger 2001, 201, n. 94 (and cf. Jacquet 2008, 419) suggests that document A.512 (*ARMT* XXVI/3) from Mari that reports Dumuzi’s entrance into the temple of Anunnitum (ll. 7–15) may also reinforce the evidence from Ḫammi-ištamar’s letter. This text uses the *hapax legomenon* *pudûm*, which may derive from the root *padûm*, “to set free.” Although the context in which the term appears is not entirely clear, Mettinger notes that the analogous Hebrew root *p-d-y* denotes “to ransom,” and therefore it has some connection to Dumuzi’s fate as portrayed in *Inana’s Descent*. Alster 2005–2006, however, finds the evidence unconvincing. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Durand 2008, 243–247 (and cf. Arnaud 1995, 24, in relation to the Emar cult). Previously, Durand associated *Yamūt*- with *mutu* “hero” (1992, 111, n. 117). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. For some references, see e.g., Streck 2000, *passim*, and cf. Feliu 2003, 189, n. 785. After decades of disagreement, the meaning of *Yamūt-* as “to die” is now proven by the logogram BA.UG7/BA.ÚŠ served <AU: Is some text missing here? Please check.> in the Emar onomasticon; see, e.g., Zadok 1991, 131; Beckman 2004, 587; O’Connor 2004, 460–461 (for earlier scholars who held this interpretation regardless of that logogram, see the bibliography in O’Connor 2004). *Contra*, i.e., Huffmon 1965, 229, who read *Yamūt*- as *Yamud-* (of the root *m-d-d*), because “the usual explanation of these names by reference to \**mwt* ‘die’, proposed by Goetze […], cannot be maintained in view of the number of deities required to ‘die.’” Interestingly, however, the component *Yamūt-* in fact conjugates with epithets, rather than with proper divine names. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Goetze 1950. Cf. also O’Connor 2004, 461, n. 118, who suggests interpreting the personal names *Yamūt-Hamadī* and *Yašūb-Hamadī* as referring to the death and resurrection of Dumuzi, “My Beloved (= *Hamadī*). For additional epithets with close meaning that conjugate with the component *Yamūt*-, see Durand 2008, 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Cf. Streck 1998, 129–130; Schwemer 2001, 503. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Arnaud 1995, 24, suggests the same for Dagan in Emar without providing additional evidence. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)